KEWEENAW BAY INDIAN COMMUNITY

Keweenaw Bay Tribal Center
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April 26, 2011

Douglas Ballotti, Acting Director
Superfund Division
USEPA REGION 5
77 West Jackson Boulevard
Mail Code: S-6J
Chicago, IL 60604-3507

Re: Preliminary Assessment, Humboldt Mill, Marquette County, Michigan

Dear Mr. Ballotti,

The Keweenaw Bay Indian Community has received your letter of April 8, 2011 including a copy of the Preliminary Assessment report titled *CERCLA Preliminary Assessment For: Humboldt Mill, Humboldt Township, Marquette County, Michigan MI ID: MIN000510488 SSID: B5YA.* We appreciate the effort by the Region 5 Superfund Division to investigate the Humboldt Mill Site (Site) as a potential major source of contaminates within the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community's (Community) ceded territory. The Community has reviewed the Humboldt Mill Preliminary Assessment (PA) and has the following comments.

1. Within the area of the PA investigation is an onsite pit lake which was used for waste disposal. This lake received reactive metal sulfide mineral processing waste in the late 1980's during gold ore processing onsite. In addition, the pit disposal lake is fed by both groundwater flow and surface water runoff from a documented source of contaminates on the south side. Despite these considerations, the waste disposal lake is not identified in the PA as a potentially significant contaminate source.

   The waste disposal lake is located in a buried bedrock valley filled on the north and south ends with permeable glacial outwash materials. The east and west sides of the lake bed are composed of bedrock where the influence of structural geology on the bedrock hydrologic system is unknown. Historically, the area was the location of mine shafts and mining operations. Underground hydrologic connections may provide groundwater pathways through which contaminants could be transported offsite into the Escanaba River watershed. Surface water flow and groundwater gradients from the waste disposal lake are to the north and towards the wetlands of the Middle Branch of the Escanaba River where contaminate migration has been documented. This connection has not been clearly delineated or characterized by the PA resulting in a lack of understanding as to how contaminants are leaching from existing contaminated materials disposed of in the pit lake into the Escanaba River watershed.

2. Another potential contaminant source not identified in the PA is surface soils or sediments on the Site which become a source themselves as other material is moved around and ongoing releases contaminate soils and sediments. These materials are a potential source of contaminant release through leaching, as dust and as particulate matter in surface water runoff. Some of the Site upland area is not vegetated which creates the potential for wind born or runoff spread of contaminants.

3. Included in the Site description is the statement that "The Site is relatively flat." However, USGS topographic maps and the PA's Figure 1 show over 200 feet of local elevation relief.

4. Also in the Site description are statements which appear to conclude that all surface water runoff flows into wetlands of the Black River when in fact portions of the Site drain into the onsite waste disposal lake where the surface and groundwater flow is to the north and is hydraulically connected to wetlands of the Middle Branch of the Escanaba River north of the Site.

5. Mines and ore processing facilities typically had onsite dumps in which materials and used equipment were disposed. There is no discussion of former dumps although they were likely present at the Humboldt Site. Dumps are potential contaminant source areas.

In conclusion, the Escanaba River watershed has had adverse environmental impacts, including fish advisories, which have adversely affected our Tribal member's treaty reserved rights within this portion of our ceded territory. Offsite migration of many contaminates have been documented at the Site. The nearest residential well has not been identified. The waste disposal lake hydrology is not understood. Surface water runoff needs to be determined onsite and other mining specific issues may not have been considered. Accordingly, we believe the decision by EPA Region 5 to perform a Site Inspection at the Humboldt Mill is appropriate. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments to you on this matter and request that we have further opportunity to consult with the EPA on these issues.

Thank you for undertaking this most important investigation.

Sincerely,

Warren C. Swartz, Jr.
President

cc: Nuria Muñiz, NPL Coordinator, EPA Region 5 Superfund Division
Patrick Hamblin, NPL Coordinator, EPA Region 5 Superfund Division
Jennifer Manville, Michigan Tribal Environmental Liaison, EPA Region 5